

VZCZCXRO9498  
OO RUEHCHI  
DE RUEHGO #0949/01 3530847  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 180847Z DEC 08  
FM AMEMBASSY RANGOON  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8482  
INFO RUEHBK/AMEMBASSY BANGKOK 2761  
RUEHCHI/AMCONSUL CHIANG MAI 1959  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000949

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EAP/MLS, DRL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/18/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA: 88GS LEADER ON PRISONER CONDITIONS,  
ACTIVISTS' FLIGHT TO THAILAND, PERSONAL SAFETY CONCERNS

REF: A. RANGOON 937

[1](#)B. 07 STATE 121998

Classified By: P/E Chief Jennifer Harhigh for Reasons 1.4 (b) & (d)

#### Summary

[1](#)1. (C) In meetings December 17 and 18, 88 Generation Students leader Toe Kyaw Hlaing relayed information gathered from his meeting with the family of Min Ko Naing and detailed what support was being provided to families of political prisoners. He observed that his profile was increasing as other activists depart for Thailand and that he is concerned about his safety. He pledged never to leave Burma and asked for USG assistance to store sensitive materials, assist families of prisoners and pay rent on a safehouse. End summary.

#### Prisoner Conditions; Support to Families

[1](#)2. (C) Toe Kyaw Hlaing told us December 17 he had just met with Min Ko Naing's family members, who had returned from a visit to Min Ko Naing in Kengtung, Shan State. According to the family, Min Ko Naing is detained in an open area outside rather than in an enclosed cell (he could provide no further information). Authorities have provided Min Ko Naing with two personal attendants, young men of Lahu ethnic origin. Due to the cold climate, the family had requested authorities provide plastic sheeting to enclose the area. Min Ko Naing had complained about eye problems but otherwise was fine, according to the family. Toe Kyaw Hlaing said he expects to meet soon with Ko Ko Gyi's brother, who had just traveled to Mine Sat, Shan State to visit Ko Ko Gyi in prison.

[1](#)3. (C) The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has been providing support to the families of political prisoners in the form of travel expenses and has extended this offer to recently sentenced prisoners, Toe Kyaw Hlaing noted. The ICRC pays for one ticket per family per month and requires beneficiaries to document their relationship to the prisoner. He noted that this condition made it difficult for some families who were unable to acquire proper documentation. Toe Kyaw Hlaing also noted that the NLD has been supporting prisoners' families, providing each with 5,000 kyat (approximately USD 4) monthly, in conjunction with the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners. He told us he himself has been using personal funds to provide prisoners with biscuits and books.

#### Release of Detained Political Activists

[1](#)4. (C) Toe Kyaw Hlaing reported that two detained 88GS activists were released from prison on December 12 with no

explanation provided by the authorities. This follows the release of U Ohn Kyaing, the chair of the NLD's Nargis relief efforts, who was released from six months' detention on December 11, also without explanation (Ref A).

15. (C) Toe Kyaw Hlaing observed that many detainees are quite aware of political developments and are able to trade information on recent arrests, transfers of prisoners, interviews with family members, etc. Some prisoners had recently shared rumors with their families, including that the GOB will release the new election law on January 26, 2009, and that the GOB will announce another general amnesty of 9,002 prisoners in conjunction with Burma's Independence Day on January 4.

#### Activists Fleeing to Thailand

16. (C) According to Toe Kyaw Hlaing, two 88GS activists, one of whom had worked for the Democratic Voice of Burma, had recently left Burma for Thailand because they were concerned by recent convictions and sentencing of political activists. He said another four or five plan to depart the country on/about December 20. Toe Kyaw Hlaing said that although his colleagues have urged him to do likewise, he will not leave Burma. He added that his profile was increasing as others fled and that he was increasingly worried about his own safety.

#### Appeal for Help

RANGOON 00000949 002 OF 002

17. (C) In light of GOB scrutiny of his activities, Toe Kyaw Hlaing asked for our assistance to store politically sensitive documents and media to ensure they were not confiscated by authorities if he is arrested and/or his house is searched. As an example, he showed us a notebook containing detailed records of political prisoners, including names and addresses of family members. He also asked for continued financial assistance to pay for a safehouse (his lease expired December 17) and to provide assistance to the families of political prisoners. Post plans to accept the documents and media and safeguard them temporarily until Toe Kyaw Hlaing can determine another safe alternative. Furthermore, Post intends to disburse the remaining USD 4,330 from an Embassy small grant created in September 2007 to provide protection and support to democracy activists under threat of arrest as authorized by Ref B. These funds must be obligated by December 31, 2008. Toe Kyaw Hlaing has already received funding under this grant, and we are confident in his ability to make use of the remaining funds in a manner that does not bring undue risk to either himself or the Embassy.

VAJDA